

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 00403 161152Z

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SUBJ: RABIN'S VIEWS: CURRENT MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

1. FOLLOWING IS SUMMARY, BASED ON NOTES TAKEN BY CANADIAN AMBASSADOR LEE AND DATT (GEN. B.G. FORSMAN), OF CONVERSATION AT THE AMBASSADOR'S DINNER FOR PRIME MINISTER RABIN ON JAN 10. MAIN TOPICS COVERED WERE THE UNSC DEBATE, THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY IMPLICATIONS OF SINAI II--WITH A DISSENTING VIEW FROM RABIN'S ADVISOR ARIK SHARON, SUEZ CANAL TRANSITS, US AID TO EGYPT AND SYRIA, JORDANIAN-SYRIAN MILITARY COOPERATION, AND JORDAN'S POLITICAL OPTIONS.

2. SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE. RABIN EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THE US WOULD RESIST EVEN MODERATE ATTEMPTS TO AMEND RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338, ON GROUNDS THAT THE PLO, SYRIA, AND THE USSR SHOULD NOT BE ENCOURAGED TO THINK THAT ANY TAMPERING WITH THE CURRENT FRAMEWORK FOR MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS WAS POSSIBLE. SIMILARLY, HE ASSERTED THAT THE WEST MUST DEMONSTRATE FIRMNESS IN THE UNSC DEBATE SO THAT THE ARABS WILL NOT MAKE ANY FURTHER ATTEMPTS TO INVOLVE THE SECURITY COUNCIL IN THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND WILL NOT INTERFERE WITH THE RECONVENING OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. (THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR COMMENTED THAT IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT RABIN HAD WANTED A FIRM COMMITMENT FROM THE US TO

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 00403 161152Z

VETO ANY RESOLUTION OR AMENDMENT DEALING WITH THE PALESTINIAN

QUESTION--THIS DESPITE AMBASSADOR TOON'S PRIOR ADVICE TO RABIN THAT THIS WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION.) ASKED WHETHER THE PROMISE OF FULL CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN THE US AND ISRAEL OVER RESPECTIVE POSITIONS TO BE ADOPTED IN THE DEBATE WAS NOT ALL THAT COULD HAVE REASONABLY BEEN EXPECTED FROM THE US, RABIN EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER WHAT THE US MIGHT DO IF A MODERATE RESOLUTION OR AMENDMENT WERE PROPOSED. HE COMMENTED THAT HE HOPED THAT THE US WOULD DO THE "RIGHT THING". THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR ALSO FOUND INTERESTING RABIN'S COMMENT THAT THE "ARABS WERE OVER-PAMPERED AND ISRAEL OVER-PRESSURED", AND NOTED THAT RABIN WARNED THAT THE NEXT EXTENSION OF THE UNDOF MANDATE CANNOT BE ACCOMPLISHED UNDER CONDITIONS OF BLACKMAIL, AS HAD THE LAST.

3. SINAI II. RABIN AGREED WITH THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR THAT SINAI II WAS USEFUL IN THAT IT HAD HELPED TO ISOLATE EGYPT FROM THE OTHER ARAB STATES, BUT EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER LONG-TERM PROSPECTS SINCE, IN HIS VIEW, EGYPT'S BASIC HOSTILITY TOWARDS ISRAEL REMAINED UNCHANGED. HE SAID THAT EGYPT HAD GAINED IMPORTANT BENEFITS FROM THE AGREEMENT, BUT OBSERVED THAT SADAT HAD NOT YET CURBED PROPAGANDA AGAINST ISRAEL AS PROVIDED BY THE INTERIM SETTLEMENT PACKAGE. THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADVISER GENERAL SHARON, ASSERTED THAT EGYPT HAD BENEFITED FAR MORE THAN ISRAEL FROM THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT. IN HIS VIEW, ONCE EGYPT HAS RECEIVED ALL IT EXPECTS FROM SETTLEMENT, IT WILL REVERT TO AN EVEN TOUGHER ANTI-ISRAELI LINE THAN BEFORE.

4. RABIN REFERRED TO A RECENT SADAT INTERVIEW IN A KUWAITI NEWSPAPER, CLAIMING THAT HIS COMMENTS DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE IS LITTLE POSSIBILITY THAT A PEACE TREATY WILL BE CONCLUDED BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WHILE HE AGREED WITH THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR'S VIEW THAT EGYPT IS UNLIKELY TO LAUNCH AN ATTACK AGAINST ISRAEL, HE SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD NOT TAKE MUCH TO HAVE EGYPT DRAGGED INTO ANOTHER ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. RABIN ADDED THAT INSTEAD OF ISRAEL, SADAT SHOULD BE PAYING MORE ATTENTION TO LIBYA. HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY EGYPT HAD NOT INVADED LIBYA, PARTICULARLY WITH ALL THE OIL RESOURCES IN THAT COUNTRY AND IN VIEW OF THE PRECARIOUS STATE OF THE EGYPTIAN ECONOMY.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 00403 161152Z

5. ISRAEL'S MILITARY POSITION IN SINAI. SHARON MADE NO SECRET OF HIS DISPLEASURE WITH SINAI II AND SAID THAT FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW THE FORWARD LINE ESTABLISHED BY THE AGREEMENT WOULD BE CLEARLY INFERIOR TO THE EXISTING ONE. THE NEW LINE WILL BE APPROXIMATELY 400 KMS IN LENGTH, IN CONTRAST TO THE 100 KMS OF THE PRESENT POSITION. SHARON OBSERVED THAT IN THE EVENT THAT EGYPT TRANSFERRED LARGE CONCENTRATIONS OF ARMED FORCES TO THE EAST BANK OF THE CANAL, THE CURRENT POSITION (BEFORE SINAI II

WITHDRAWALS ARE COMPLETED) AFFORDED ISRAEL TWO OPTIONS--TO TRANSFER STANDING FORCES TO SINAI IN SUFFICIENT NUMBERS TO COUNTER THE THREAT OR TO MOBILIZE RESERVES FOR THE SAME PURPOSE. THE GREATLY INCREASED LENGTH OF THE SINAI II LINES, ACCORDING TO SHARON, WILL RULE OUT THE FIRST OPTION. HE STRONGLY INFERRED THAT HIS PREFERRED COURSE OF ACTION WOULD BE TO FORCE THE EGYPTIANS BACK ACROSS THE CANAL. HE ALSO NOTED THAT ALTHOUGH THE EGYPTIANS COULD NOT DEFEAT ISRAEL IN BATTLE, THEY COULD DEFEAT HER BY FORCING MOBILIZATION FOR EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME.

6. TRANSITS OF THE SUEZ CANAL. RABIN BEGAN BY STATING THAT ISRAEL CARGOES CURRENTLY FACED NO PROBLEMS IN TRANSITING THE CANAL. HOWEVER, WHEN SHARON QUESTIONED THIS VIEW, RABIN ADMITTED THAT CERTAIN PROBLEMS EXISTED, NOT BECAUSE OF EGYPT BUT BECAUSE THE ARAB LEAGUE'S BOYCOTT ACTIVITIES MADE IT DIFFICULT TO SECURE SHIPS TO CARRY ISRAELI CARGOES THROUGH THE CANAL. ASKED ABOUT FUTURE TRANSITS OF ISRAELI SHIPS, RABIN OBSERVED THAT EGYPT'S FORMAL POSITION WAS THAT SUCH TRANSITS WOULD BE POSSIBLE ONLY IN CONJUNCTION WITH A FINAL PEACE SETTLEMENT. HE IMPLIED THAT THE ABSENCE IN SINAI II OF ANY REFERENCE TO TRANSITS OF ISRAELI SHIPS WAS A VICTORY FOR HIS NEGOTIATING TEAM IN THAT NO SPECIFIC RESTRICTIVE CONDITIONS WERE SET ON THIS MATTER.

7. US AID TO ARAB STATES. RABIN DREW A SHARP DISTINCTION BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA WITH REGARD TO THE QUESTION OF US ECONOMIC AID. IN EGYPT'S CASE, RABIN SAID THAT ISRAEL WAS NOT OPPOSED TO US AID GRANTS BECAUSE THEY WOULD SERVE TO REINFORCE EGYPT'S ESTRANGEMENT FROM THE USSR. HOWEVER, SINCE SYRIA WAS STILL IN THE SOVIET CAMP, ISRAEL OPPOSED ANY SIGNIFICANT AID TO ASAD. RABIN SIMPLY DISMISSED THE CONTENTION THAT US AID TO SYRIA MIGHT CONVINCE THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WISDOM OF A SADAT-LIKE TURN TO THE WEST. HE SAID THAT IF ASAD WERE TO RECEIVE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 TEL AV 00403 161152Z

SIGNIFICANT US AID WITHOUT FIRST MODIFYING HIS PRO-SOVIET STANCE, IT COULD LEAD SADAT TO REEVALUATE HIS POSITION AND TURN BACK TOWARD THE SOVIETS.

8. JORDAN. RABIN EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN JORDAN AND SYRIA, ABOUT WHICH THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION, WILL NOT LEAD TO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES. EVEN IF HUSSEIN IS FORCED TO EFFECT COSMETIC COORDINATION IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE JORDANIAN ARMY WILL ACTUALLY BE PLACED UNDER SYRIAN CONTROL. THOUGH RABIN DID NOT SEE THE POSSIBILITY IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE OF HUSSEIN PARTICIPATING ON BEHALF OF THE PALESTINIANS IN NEGOTIATIONS RELATING TO THE FUTURE OF THE WEST BANK, JORDAN'S IMPROVED ECONOMIC CONDITION--RESULTING FROM THE INCREASED WORLD PRICE OF POTASH AND FROM THE INFLUX OF WEALTH CAUSED BY THE FLIGHT OF MULTI-NATIONAL CORPORATIONS

FROM BEIRUT TO AMMAN--AND HUSSEIN'S POLITICAL STRENGTH WOULD
MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO WAIT UNTI FURTHER INTER-ARAB
CONFRONTATIONS GAVE HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO REGAIN HIS POSITION
WITH WEST BANK PALESTINIANS.
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